PRODUCTION NOTES

Rookie cops Judy Hopps (voiced by Ginnifer Goodwin) and Nick Wilde (voiced by Jason Bateman) find themselves on the twisting trail of a great mystery when pit viper Gary De'Snake (voiced by Academy Award® winner Ke Huy Quan) arrives in Zootopia and turns the animal metropolis upside down in Walt Disney Animation Studios' all-new animated comedy-adventure, "Zootopia 2." To crack the case, Judy and Nick must go undercover to unexpected new parts of town, where their growing partnership is tested like never before. There's plenty of action, humor and surprises as this unlikely rabbit and fox duo attempt to redeem their reputations, solve Zootopia's biggest and oldest mystery, and prove that they can work together as a team.

"Zootopia 2" builds upon the relatable message of the first film, amplifying the hopeful, universal idea that with perseverance and teamwork, anyone can achieve anything if they're willing to try. The new film picks up directly after the conclusion of the first, with Judy and Nick trying to make their new partnership work despite some growing pains. But just as they are discovering their strengths (and differences) as a team, they are swept up in a decades-old mystery involving Zootopia's most prominent family, the Lynxleys, coupled with the arrival of the first snake to be seen in the animal metropolis for 100 years. When Judy and Nick infiltrate the Zootennial gala – the most glamorous party in town, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the city's weather walls – they begin to unravel Zootopia's biggest secret and even become fugitives themselves.

"Zootopia 2" boasts an incredible roster of talent lending their voices to returning favorites, along with an entertaining and diverse group of new characters. Ginnifer Goodwin and Jason Bateman reprise their starring roles as Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde, bringing new humor and heart to these central characters. Idris Elba (Chief Bogo), Bonnie Hunt (Bonnie Hopps) and Don Lake (Stu Hopps), Maurice Lamarche (Mr. Big), Nate Torrence (Clawhauser), and Raymond S. Persi (Flash the Sloth), are also back as part of the returning cast. And the iconic Shakira is back as Zootopia's favorite pop star, Gazelle. Among the new additions are Ke Huy Quan (Gary De'Snake), Fortune Feimster (Nibbles Maplestick), Andy Samberg (Pawbert Lynxley), Patrick Warburton (Mayor Winddancer), and Quinta Brunson (as a quokka therapy animal named Dr. Fuzzby).

The impressive animal cast for "Zootopia 2" includes 178 unique characters (with variations of that number reaching up to 1,850 taking into account costume and fur changes), representing 67 different species. One of the most technically complex aspects of the film was creating the articulating scales for Gary De'Snake which includes 448 on his head, 160 on his belly (ventral side) and 2,392 on his dorsal side.

"Zootopia" was released in 2016 and went on to become a global box office sensation, grossing over $1 billion worldwide. The film won the Oscar® for "Best Animated Feature" along with numerous other accolades. "Zootopia" continued a long Disney Animation tradition of talking

animal films, and sprang from the notion of exploring what a mammal metropolis would look like if it was designed by animals.

At the helm of “Zootopia 2” are two of the most talented and acclaimed filmmakers working in animation today – Jared Bush and Byron Howard. They had previously directed the Oscar-winning 2021 feature, “Encanto,” (co-written by Bush) and “Zootopia,” (where Howard was director and Bush co-writer/co-director). Bush currently serves as Chief Creative Officer of Disney Animation (a role he assumed in September 2024), and he also wrote the screenplay for “Zootopia 2.” Additionally, he wrote “Moana” and co-wrote “Moana 2.”

Byron Howard is a two-time Oscar-winner (“Zootopia” and “Encanto”), who made his feature directing debut in 2006 with “Bolt,” and went on to direct “Tangled,” Zootopia,” and “Encanto.” He launched his animation career in 1994 at the Disney Animation Studio in Florida, where he contributed animation to such landmark films as “Pocahontas,” “Mulan,” “Lilo & Stitch,” and “Brother Bear.”

“Zootopia 2” reunites Bush and Howard with veteran Disney Animation producer, Yvett Merino, also an Oscar winner as producer on “Encanto.” Merino previously produced “Moana 2” and the Emmy®-winning short film “Once Upon a Studio.” With nearly 30 years at Disney Animation, she has worked in production on features including “Tangled,” “Big Hero 6,” and “Moana.”

Michael Giacchino reprises his role as composer, having also composed scores for many Disney-Pixar films including “The Incredibles” films, “Coco,” and “Up,” for which he received an Oscar for “Best Original Score.”

According to Bush, “The first ‘Zootopia’ is one of the most visually, rich, complicated and just plain insane feats Disney Animation has ever pulled off…and we knew this film had to reach even higher. There are dozens of complex, detailed environments and literally a cast of hundreds of different animals including reptiles, lynxes and semi-aquatic animals. The film is honestly awe-inspiring on every creative and technical level."

“This crazy animal city is truly my happy place,” he continues. “It is entertainment first, but it also speaks to human nature. At the heart of our story is the relationship between Judy Hopps and Nicholas Wilde – our hero bunny cop and her fox con artist pal. But they are not on their adventure alone. The mystery of our story is why this venomous pit viper (Gary De’Snake) has arrived in Zootopia, and why there haven’t been any snakes in the city for the past century.”

Howard recalls, “I met Jared when he was brought in to write on the first ‘Zootopia’ film, and, from the start, we were very much like brothers. We had tons of things in common. We’re both afraid of heights, we both play trombone, we both love snickerdoodle cookies. We bonded very quickly over the idea of creating an animal movie together. The idea of animals in an animal city built by animals was really fascinating to everyone, and we jumped in from day one to create that world. After the first movie wrapped, we always knew that this world was built for many, many more stories.

“In the first film, we were only able to include mammals, because of the predator-prey theme, but we always knew that there were reptiles and other semi-aquatic animals out there,” adds Howard. “As we were wrapping ‘Encanto,’ Jared did a little sketch on a story pad that said, ‘Zootopia 2,’ and the 2 was shaped like a snake. Working on this film with Jared was such an easy, comfortable thing for me to jump back into because we both made the world together. Yvett is the third leg to

our tripod, and she is not only a great producer, but she brings a great sense of empathy and humanity to the entire production."

Merino observes, "Having worked closely with Byron and Jared on 'Encanto,' I look at this film a bit like coming home. They're both truly great talents with great senses of humor, amazingly creative and smart, and super experienced. My job on this film is partnering with them to make sure whatever vision is in their minds ends up on screen."

Bush notes, "We knew this movie was going to be an enormous challenge for many reasons, and the sheer scope and ambition was going to be huge. This meant having a producer that could do all these things was critical, and Yvett brought a unique skill set that allowed us to get the movie made, and to keep the entire team feeling good and the morale high throughout the process. She's a straight shooter with tremendous knowledge and a terrific sense of the big picture, and she always knows how to manage the workload and expectations. Bryon and I love working with her."

Heads of Animation, Kira Lehtomaki and Chad Sellers, oversaw the amazing team of animators that brought life to the diverse cast of animal characters featured in the film. Keith Wilson served as Head of Characters and Technical Animation for the film, and was responsible for leading the character look development, modeling, rigging, and simulation teams, as well as all technical aspects related to the film's wide range of animal characters.

Overseeing the incredible production design for "Zootopia 2" is Cory Loftis, who played a key role in the look and design of the characters on the first "Zootopia" in his role as art director, characters. Under his direction, and working in close coordination with the directors, Loftis was in charge of the team designing the characters, environments and props for the film. Assisting him was associate production designer, Griselda Sastrawinata-Lemay, who focused on creating a color palette that honored the previous film, while taking it in new directions with the expanding worlds and environments. Meg Park and Sang Jun Lee were the art directors for the characters, and Limei Hshieh and Mehrdad Isvandi served as art directors for environments.

Carrie Liao was head of story, and guided the story team, in collaboration with co-head of story, David VanTuyle. The directors invited the story team to participate in recording and editing sessions, which afforded more insights into the overall production process. Another innovation on this film was the introduction of "Story Jam" sessions which provided a looser and more creative atmosphere to focus on specific situations.

Adding excitement, dimension and fun to the proceedings were directors of cinematography, Tyler Kupferer (Layout) and Daniel Rice (Lighting), who brought ambitious cinematic techniques to the film's wide range of environments, and daring action scenes (like the film's high-speed opening chase scene throughout the familiar streets of Zootopia).

Visual effects supervisors Marlon West and Greg Smith played a key role on the technical side with regard to the overall look of the production, from assets and modeling through to lighting the final frames of film. Their roles also included guiding the film's visual effects for such exciting and dynamic scenes as the thrilling water tube chase which begins in Marsh Market, where Zootopia's semi-aquatic animals live and reptiles are rumored to hide out.

ZOO'S WHO AND WHO'S GNU: A GUIDE TO THE CAST OF CHARACTERS (RETURNING AND NEW)

JUDY HOPPS (voiced by Ginnifer Goodwin) has achieved her dream to become Zootopia's first bunny cop, and is determined to prove that she and her partner, former con artist Nick Wilde, can be the best team on the force.

NICK WILDE (voiced by Jason Bateman) is a former con artist who has recently become Zootopia's first fox police officer. But even though he and his partner, Judy Hopps, have cracked the city's biggest case, Nick finds that he still has a lot to learn about being part of a team.

GARY DE'SNAKE (voiced by Ke Huy Quan) is a sweet, lovable – and super venomous – blue pit viper on a mission to restore his family's good name by solving a Zootopian mystery decades in the making.

NIBBLES MAPLESTICK (voiced by Fortune Feimster) is a down-home, oddball beaver whose podcast, Scales & Tales of the Weird, explores conspiracies, reptile mysteries and rumors about the wetland creatures of her home, Marsh Market.

PAWBERT LYNXLEY (voiced by Andy Samberg) is the easy-going runt of the powerful Lynxley family.

MILTON LYNXLEY (voiced by David Strathairn) is a powerful business mammal and the patriarch of one of Zootopia's oldest and most prestigious families.

CHIEF BOGO (voiced by Idris Elba) is the well-respected head of Zootopia Police Department, with little patience for Judy and Nick's shenanigans.

GAZELLE (voiced by Shakira) is Zootopia's biggest pop star, revered by herds of fans.

MAYOR BRIAN WINDDANCER (voiced by Patrick Warburton) is an actor-turned-politician, and a charismatic but clueless stallion who dreams of being as heroic in real life as the characters he once played on television.

DR. FUZZBY (voiced by Quinta Brunson) is an adorable quokka (a small Australian marsupial), therapy animal who helps Judy and Nick sort out a few issues in their new partnership.

CLAWHAUSER (voiced by Nate Torrence) is Zootopia Police Department's charming cheetah receptionist. He loves two things: pop star Gazelle and donuts.

BONNIE AND STU HOPPS (voiced by Bonnie Hunt and Don Lake) are the loving parents of Judy and her hundreds of little brothers and sisters.

CATTRICK LYNXLEY (voiced by Macaulay Culkin) is the ambitious, oldest son of the powerful Lynxley family.

KITTY LYNXLEY (voiced by Brenda Song) is the sharp-tongued daughter of the Lynxley family.

MR. BIG (voice of Maurice LaMarche) is a tiny arctic shrew who used to run the crime family by himself. Now that he's a loving grandpapa, he runs things with the help of his favorite daughter, Fru Fru.

FRU FRU (voiced by Leah Latham) is the stylish and sassy arctic shrew who now co-runs the family business with her crime-boss father, Mr. Big.

FLASH (voiced by Raymond S. Persi) may be a mild-mannered Department of Mammal Vehicles employee, but behind the wheel, he has a lead foot and the need for speed.

OFFICER McHORN (voiced by Mark Rhino Smith) has developed a thick skin – even for a rhinoceros – from his years of service to the Zootopia Police Department.

YAX (voiced by Tommy Chong) is a laid-back and free-spirited yak – and an occasional sage, delivering unexpected wisdom.

FINNICK is a fennec fox with a big chip on his adorable shoulder. He seems to hate every scam he's asked to pull off – usually because he's in a baby costume.

Additional cast still to be announced.

BETTER ZOOGETHER: JUDY AND NICK TAKE THEIR PARTNERSHIP TO THE NEXT LEVEL

At the end of "Zootopia," Judy Hopps, the first bunny cop on the Zootopia Police Department (ZPD), and con artist, Nick Wilde, end up saving the day by exposing the duplicitous Assistant Mayor Bellwether, and clearing the predator population of any wrongdoing. The film concludes with Nick graduating from the police academy, being named the first fox officer on the force, and teaming up with Judy for new adventures. The encouraging message that anyone can be anything if they put their heart and effort into it was embraced by audiences worldwide and was a key theme the filmmakers were excited to expand upon in the sequel.

"Zootopia 2" picks up where the first film left off, with Judy and Nick finding their way as new police partners and realizing that they don't really know much about each other as individuals. When the duo gets a hot tip on a smuggling operation, they take it upon themselves to go undercover to try to uncover the scheme, but end up in a hot pursuit with a crooked anteater driving a getaway catering van. Things do not go according to plan, Chief Bogo reads them the riot act and puts them on notice, resulting in Judy and Nick being sent to partners' therapy to work out their problems with Dr. Fuzzby (a quokka therapy animal voiced by Quinta Brunson). That's just the beginning of the story in "Zootopia 2," and how these unlikely partners come to understand one another and work together lies at the emotional core of the film.

"If the first movie was about becoming friends for the first time," notes Howard, "this movie is about learning things about each other that are brand new. It's like when new friends share an apartment together, and they start to figure out things like, 'oh, you don't do dishes,' and 'you don't return phone calls.' There are things they're learning about each other that are definitely new.

"The theme of this movie is about partnerships. It's about Nick and Judy really seeing under the surface and figuring out what makes the other tick. Nick is not a guy who easily gets in touch with his emotions, and he has to dig down deep to say things to Judy that he would never say to anyone else."

"Ginnifer and Jason, reprising their roles as Hopps and Wilde, really make the characters and their relationship so much fun and real," says Howard. "From day one, they jumped back into the recording booth and knew these characters as well as we do. There's so much of Nick that is

Jason, and the same for Ginnifer and Hopps. That's the best situation possible for recording voices for animation. You're not asking anyone to pretend to be someone else or to put on a funny voice. Because these characters are so much of who they genuinely are. It's so much fun seeing them go to new places and to watch the growth in their friendship."

RETURN TO ZOOTOPIA: CREATING A SEQUEL WORTHY OF THE ORIGINAL

"Byron and I honestly started thinking about a sequel to 'Zootopia' while we were still doing the first movie, which was over 10 years ago," recalls Bush. "I think we really felt that this world was such a fun place to spend time in, and it seemed like a real place to us. In the first film, we got to see one part of the city, but there's other parts of the city, and a larger continent with other cities. The idea that there are many more stories to tell is something that we really cared about."

"Being able to expand in the sequel was something that we were always very excited about. Why didn't we see reptiles in the first film? They couldn't just conveniently show up. There had to be a thematic story point, and that's what we spent the last few years really trying to figure out."

Howard observes, "Sequels are really tough, and the characters need to evolve. The trick is maintaining the chemistry while giving the audience something new and interesting. With 'Zootopia 2,' we wanted the relationship between Judy and Nick to be a bit more contentious. The story takes place almost literally after the first movie wrapped up so this allowed us to keep them in a place where they're partners now, but they're in different circumstances. We wound up where they still feel like the characters that we know and love, but they're going through something different."

Bush adds, "I looked at sequels to movies that I loved, and the ones that were most successful, from my perspective, were the ones that continued the character stories in a way that felt real. You know everything that the main characters have learned and how they've grown in the first film. Continuing that growth in the second film was something that I felt sets a great sequel apart. We needed to keep the focus on Judy and Nick.

"In 'Zootopia 2,' there's all these shiny objects around, and there's these fun new mystery paths to go down," Bush continues. "There's also lots of new characters to meet in this crazy comedy world. In writing this film, I had to be disciplined in sticking with what matters most, and that was the Judy and Nick story.

Working with Bush to bring the story of "Zootopia 2" to the screen was a team of story artists under the leadership of Carrie Liao, head of story, and David VanTuyle, co-head of story.

Liao recalls, "From the very beginning on this film, Jared was really emphasizing his desire to try and do things differently. He talked about wanting to replicate the creative freedom of a live-action writer's room, where people felt comfortable to throw out a ton of ideas. It led to a safe environment where anyone could suggest something without the pressure of it having to be the right thing. Instead of telling us what he thought, he created space for the team, and this helped us move the story along more quickly. He also invited us to recording sessions and into the editing room, which gave us new insights and made us feel part of the bigger process."

"One of the new things that we tried on this film was called a 'Story Jam,'" continues Liao. "It was a way for us to come up with fun ideas and gags for a particular problem or situation. For example, the sequence in Marsh Market was really rich for exploration, so we brought all of the story artists

together, and invited them to do some research beforehand – like find pictures of marshes and bring images of five different animals that lived there. We laid drawings on the table, had story pads ready, put music on, and the only goal for the next couple of hours was to come up with funny ideas for the market. We did this for other sequences as well."

"The 'Story Jam' was a way to get the team to focus, loosen up, and get drawing again, versus sitting in a room talking about ideas," says VanTuyle. "It provided a really creative environment and brought the team closer as a result. This led to further discussions and explorations outside of the room. A lot of those ideas made it into the movie."

Liao observes, "Jared would frequently come to one of the story meetings and talk about his favorite movies, or a film he had recently watched and how it had inspired ideas for 'Zootopia 2.' We would have watch parties, and we looked at lots of buddy cop movies and mystery-oriented stories. Jared would always remind us how the relationship between Judy and Nick was the core of the film. What is their arc in the film?"

In addition to his story role on the film, VanTuyle ended up providing the voice of a walrus named Russ, who has a unique conversation with Nibbles Maplestick in a memorable and hilarious scene in Marsh Market.

"I was doing reference dialogue for Russ, and Jared liked what I was doing and started to improvise with me," recalls VanTuyle. "He was flying so fast, and he said, just repeat after me, and we went back and forth. You can hear the panic in my voice, but that's what we ended up using in the film."

Bush concludes, "More than anything, I think people go to the theater because they want to feel something; they want to be entertained. They want to feel joy, and experience the entire range of emotions. And they want to be transported to places they haven't seen before, with characters they absolutely love. One of the amazing benefits of 'Zootopia' is that this is a wildly creative, entertaining world, but the characters at the center of it are ones that you want to spend time with and that you can root for."

ANIMATING ANIMALS: A SEASONED TEAM OF DISNEY ANIMATORS BRING LIFE TO A WIDE RANGE OF CHARACTERS IN "ZOOTOPIA 2"

With a cast of 178 different characters (ranging in size from tiny arctic shrews to hippos, walruses, and giraffes) representing 67 species, the animation team at Disney Animation had their work cut out for them. From the complexity of animating major newcomers like Gary De'Snake and Nibbles Maplestick, to expanding upon the established and expressive actions of returning stars like Judy and Nick, animation took center stage in creating the story of "Zootopia 2" and the film presented some new and unique challenges.

Heading up the Animation team for the film were Kira Lehtomaki and Chad Sellers, who both served as animation supervisors on the first "Zootopia." Lehtomaki supervised Judy Hopps, and Sellers animated Mr. Big, Mayor Lionheart, and Flash the Sloth on the original film.

The animation supervisors for "Zootopia 2" are Leif Jeffers (Nick Wilde), Valentin Amador (Judy Hopps), Benson Shum (Nibbles Maplestick), Adam Green (Gary De'Snake), Bert Klein (Mayor Brian Winddancer), and Nathan Engelhardt (Pawbert Lynxley).

“Working on ‘Zootopia 2’ has been a great experience,” says Lehtomaki. “Byron is always a joy because he’s such a master at animation. We all collectively feel like we’ve learned so much from him. He brings out the best work in all of us. Having supervised Judy on the first film, I also feel some ownership over the character as well as a strong connection to the film, and it’s great to be a part of this new chapter in Judy’s life. You tend to miss the characters when the film is over.”

Sellers adds, “One of the awesome things that we’re doing on this film is having the supervisors for each character sit in the room with the voice talent during the recording sessions. They get to meet the actors, draw and observe them, and see their expressions while they’re reading their lines. When Jared’s directing them, and gives them feedback on their performance, you can almost bring that with you when you start animating the scene.”

“One of the things we’re trying to do with our animation for Judy and Nick is to visually demonstrate the differences between them,” explains Lehtomaki. “We’re really looking for ways to contrast the sly relaxed fox who appears to not really care too much about anything with Judy’s high strung, overachieving positive attitude and who’s always giving 110 percent. We’re trying to find ways in our posing, acting and expressions so that if you paused any frame of the film, you could see their differences clearly displayed.”

The animators were able to observe some of the animals up close at the studio with visits from rabbits, porcupines, snakes and a tortoise. Other animators took trips to local aquariums to study marine and semi-aquatic mammals for themselves. Nature documentaries and lectures on animal anatomy also helped in their research. Supervising animator Bert Klein invited some of his colleagues over to his home to watch his pet goats.

For Benson Shum, the supervising animator on Nibbles Maplestick, a busy beaver podcaster who specializes in Marsh Market mysteries and reptile conspiracies, observing the behavior of real beavers was a starting point in his process. Reviewing previous Disney Animation beaver characters, like the one in “Lady and the Tramp,” also proved useful.

“From watching footage of real beavers online and in nature documentaries, we were able to study their behaviors and mannerisms, so that we could manifest them into anthropomorphic characteristics,” notes Shum. “For example, they tend to put their arms and hands pretty close to their chest so we tried to pepper that into the character to make her more believable. Also, when she’s swimming, she becomes more fluid because she’s very comfortable in the water. Beavers tend to waddle on land because they’re not comfortable on two feet.

“The really fun part about animating Nibbles starts with the design by visual development artist Ami Thompson, and the great voice of Fortune Feimster, which gave us so much personality right from the start,” continues Shum. “Adding to that personality is Nibbles’s great big teeth. One of the fun discoveries with her was figuring out how to create mouth shapes so that her teeth didn’t completely cover her face. With his great background in animation, Byron was able to do a few lines in a drawing for us, and we knew exactly what he wanted, and how to show the appeal and sincerity.

“Fortune was the perfect voice for Nibbles, and gave the character a certain rhythm that was really entertaining,” he adds. “It’s not a cadence that we usually hear and it comes from her timing and experience as a comedian. Just watching her in the booth informed our animation, because she uses her whole body when she’s acting. She brought things to the character that nobody else

would have thought of. Observing what she does with her mouth and hand gestures really added to the character."

Shum and his team also observed real podcasters on the internet and incorporated some of those mannerisms and conspiratorial tones into the character. He explains, "Jared talked about how he wanted Nibbles to be as strange as possible, and we had her lean into the camera a lot and used skewed eyebrows as if to say, 'I have a secret to tell you.'"

According to Bush, "Fortune was someone I knew early on had to be in our film, and Nibbles was the perfect character for her to play. She has this unbelievable knack of making things hilarious that weren't ever intended to be funny. She can take exposition and phrase it in a way that it becomes character comedy. One of my favorite things was to be at a recording session with her. She would bring tons of ideas to the table, and we have hours and hours of outtakes of her doing monologues of Nibbles just ranting about things that are absolutely hilarious. She has a really amazing gift of being able to put herself into a character situation, and then improvise as that character. And that's very difficult to do in character."

CREATING THE CHARACTER OF GARY DE'SNAKE: OSCAR WINNER KE HUY QUAN INSPIRES THE ANIMATION AND DESIGN TEAM

Snakes have had juicy roles in Disney Animation features in the past, most notably Kaa from "The Jungle Book" and Sir Hiss from "Robin Hood," but Gary De'Snake gave the character designers, modeling, rigging, and animation teams lots of great material to work with. Ke Huy Quan brought a warmth, sincerity and comedic delivery to the performance, which took it to the next level. Adam Green (who oversaw the CG animation of Mickey Mouse as Head of Animation for the 2013 animated short, "Get a Horse") was the animation supervisor for Gary.

"I was enamored with Gary's design from the moment I saw it, and I knew I had to work on that character," recalls Green. "I really connected with his vulnerability and the quirky, funny things he does. I also love to animate complicated and physically complex characters like octopuses and snakes, so this was totally in my wheelhouse. Coincidentally, my father's name is Gary.

"I worked closely with Chris Pederson, who rigged the character model, and our goal was to make Gary interesting, funny, and someone audiences could relate to. Snakes can be scary and off-putting, but we wanted to break through and not have that be the case. We also wanted Gary's animation rig to be approachable for the animators. Snakes are historically difficult to animate, and Disney has never done a main character before that was a snake."

Bush had initially come up with the idea of casting Quan as the voice of Gary, after seeing the actor on television as a guest on a late night talk show.

According to Green, "Jared and I spoke after he showed us the clip, and I asked him if I would be allowed to do an animation test to his voice. The rig was in an early stage of development, but I animated it to sell the idea of how Ke's voice would sound coming out of Gary. Jared's instinct was right on the money, and when I showed him the clip, the energy in the room went crazy. About a month after that, it was announced that Ke was going to do the voice."

Green and his team had the benefit of bringing real snakes to the studio to study. After observing and experimenting with the animation rig, the Gary team learned how to articulate the character, and deal with the limitations of having no appendages.

“We learned to use Gary’s tail a lot, almost like a hand,” observes Green. “It is very versatile, and it became part of our performance arsenal. If we needed the equivalent of two hands, we would fold a piece of Gary over, like a fake arm, and he could make gestures that way. The animation for the character was done in Presto, and one of the benefits of this software program was that it gave the animators the ability to slide the scales up and down his body. When Gary’s body came to a hard stop, we could keep the scales undulating a bit so the he feels very fleshy.”

On one occasion, Quan was at the studio for a recording session, and was invited to visit the animators and see them in action.

“He was so excited, and told us that he was personally thrilled to be the voice of a Disney character and to be part of this family,” says Green. “He was so humble, and such a devoted craftsman. It was a joy to work with him.”

Byron Howard adds, “Ke was such a brilliant choice to voice Gary. One of the things we try to do with our movies is to invert expectations. When you see a 12-foot-long pit viper with huge fangs, you don’t expect Ke Huy Quan’s voice to come out of it. Ke brought such vulnerability, heart and sincerity to the character that he quickly became the emotional center of the movie.”

Green concludes, “One of the things we learned about pit vipers was that their face has a heart shape because they have venom sacks on the sides of their head. That became part of his design. People know when snakes look wrong, so we want to make them feel correct scientifically and biologically, but then put a layer of caricature on top of it. The trick with Gary is that he needs to feel like a snake, and you need to see the skin sliding and the contact with the ground. You need to feel like there’s muscle and bone underneath, but you also want to feel like he’s a cute, fun, interesting, and endearing character. There’s a layer of performance that lives on top of all of that which is caricatured. We start with the base of realism, and then build on top of that to make it believable.”

From a technical standpoint, Gary presented many challenges to Keith Wilson, head of characters and technical animation, and his team.

“Gary had the most research and development associated with him of any of the characters,” says Wilson. “He’s basically a rope with a face on it, so that may not seem so complicated, but the tricky thing is because he’s a rope, he can form any shape. We needed the ability for animation to have tons of control to add to Gary’s performance and make him more expressive.

“Once we got the approved drawing of Gary from Cory and his team, we sent it to Alena Loftis in modeling, and began exploring it in 3D space from a couple of director-approved poses,” adds Wilson. “The Gary team then began meeting to discuss what his locomotion and animation needs were. We looked at a lot snakes from other films, had Eric Goldberg [legendary hand-drawn animator known for his work on “Aladdin” and the “Moana” films] do some early 2D tests for us, and talked about things that hadn’t been explored before from an animation perspective. Scales are something that we haven’t done on a character in quite a while here. Typically, we would just do them as displacement. But we knew the animators were going to do a lot of stretching and acting with Gary, so they needed to control how the scales bind to the body, and control where its stretching. We came up with a ton of controls – 14 main ones, and 40 sub controls – to give Adam and his team the flexibility they needed.”

Another piece of the puzzle for Wilson and his team was figuring out how to rig Gary so that his body would make contact with the ground and move in a believable way.

Wilson explains, “Working in close coordination with Adam, our team was able to repurpose a path mode that Pixar had used to keep vehicles in contact with the ground, and to send characters walking down paths. This allowed the animators to focus on the performance, and the technical animation team could have the character slither or follow a sidewinding pattern on the ground plane. In one particular scene, Adam animated Gary going up a pole, and drew him wrapped around. It wouldn’t have been possible to achieve all of those actions for Gary without repurposing this program.”

“I think for sheer appeal on screen, Gary is my favorite character,” concludes Wilson. “He’s just so different from all of the other characters, and he has these crazy inventive ways of using his coils.”

EXPANDING THE WORLD OF ZOOTOPIA: HOW THE FILMMAKERS CONJURED UP IMAGINATIVE NEW ENVIRONMENTS

For production designer Cory Loftis, associate production designer Griselda Sastrawinata-Lemay, and a team of art directors, visual development artists, and technical experts, “Zootopia 2” opened a world of possibilities for expanding the animal metropolis (made possible by a system of climate regulating weather walls) to include new environments for reptiles and pinnipeds (semi-aquatic animals including seals, sea lions and walruses).

“Having worked on the first ‘Zootopia,’ I designed a lot of the characters, and provided some help with environments too,” says Loftis. “I was excited to work on the sequel and to discover that there were a lot of new characters and mostly new environments. It was fun to go back to that world and imagine whole communities that didn’t exist before, and to help design a timeline that explored the history of Zootopia. There was a dynamic with the directors and the story team, where they would imagine things, I would absorb them, and then come up with things that they would absorb. We would interact with each other, and just throw ideas into this creative pot.

“The first new environment that I worked on for this film was Marsh Market,” he adds. “Jared had this idea for a neighborhood of semi-aquatic mammals, so I started thinking about what that means for animals that don’t really need to be on land. How do we design that? Limei Hshieh, our art director for environments, had a big hand in designing the way the world works, the shape of the buildings, how the boats pass through the buildings, and things like how the walkways could lower into the water so that animals can swim over the top. She had all of these fantastic ideas. We had a lot of fun overloading Marsh Market with as many visuals, gags, signage, and fun things as possible for the audience to enjoy.

According to Hshieh, “Jared and Cory told me to think of Marsh Market as a water park, and since my background is in theme park design, I was very excited to work on this. There’s a lot of hustle and bustle in this area, and we tried to make it a place where these marine animals live, but also have fun. Ryan Lang designed it as a living habitat where creatures like sea lions are able to move about easily with lots of slides, ramps and tubes. Working with Cory has been amazing. He always has such fun ideas, and his artwork is not only about making a beautiful image, but it always has a lot of humor too.”

One of the most exciting action sequences in “Zootopia 2” takes place in Marsh Market, as Judy and Nick pursue Gary on a wild chase through a series of elaborate water tubes that serve as the transport system for the residents.

“We started with the idea that these water tubes are like a subway system for the semi-aquatic mammals to move around,” says Loftis. “Jared wrote this scene where Judy and Nick pursue Gary all the way to the other side of Zootopia, and, working with the layout team and other departments, we designed this crazy rollercoaster ride. The environments team added details to the camera moves that layout created and worked in a very different and unique way on this.”

Another new setting for “Zootopia 2” is Lynxley Manor in Tundratown, where the city’s biggest celebration – the Zootennial gala – takes place, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the city’s weather wall climate control system which makes the entire Zootopia ecosystem possible. It is the home of Milton Lynxley, head of the most prestigious family in Zootopia, and whose ancestor (Ebenezer Lynxley) invented the weather walls. Adding to the excitement of the event is a rare display – and mysterious theft – of the historic Lynxley Journal, documenting the famous invention.

In addition to these new areas of Zootopia, Loftis and his team had a chance to revisit “The Big Six” districts from the first film. They are:

SAHARA SQUARE: Made up of sand dunes and buildings shaped like sand dunes, this part of the city is home to nocturnal desert animals. This area features nighttime activities like casinos, a giant palm tree hotel and a surrounding oasis.

TUNDRATOWN: Constructed mainly of ice and snow, with giant snow blowers to control the climate, Tundratown is one cool district with floating blocks of ice instead of moving sidewalks and cars on skis.

THE RAINFOREST DISTRICT: Filled with more than half a million giant trees, this moist verdant area features elaborate walkways, bridges and gondolas across the landscape.

BUNNYBURROW: Judy Hopps’s hometown is inhabited mostly by carrot farmers like her parents, Bonnie and Stu. Located 200 miles from the bustling center of Zootopia, Bunnyburrow’s sprawling open spaces are in sharp contrast to the busy city streets of the city center.

SAVANNA CENTRAL: This is Zootopia’s central hub, and the location of Zootopia Police Department (ZPD), City Hall and Central Station (where Judy Hopps landed when she first arrived in town). Animals from each of the districts converge here.

LITTLE RODENTIA: This part of the city is home to Zootopia’s smallest mammals. It features rodent-sized housing, shops and streets, and is surrounded by a big fence to keep out big animals. Mr. Big and his family, including daughter Fru Fru, and granddaughter, Little Judith, live here.

TECHNOLOGIAL ADVANCEMENTS, BOLD VISUAL EFFECTS AND INNOVATIVE CINEMATOGRAPHY ADD NEW EXCITEMENT TO “ZOOTOPIA 2”

In terms of technical excellence, “Zootopia 2” represents a major leap from the impressive achievements of the first film. In the nine years since the release of the “Zootopia,” technology

has advanced in several areas, giving the animation team new tools and the filmmakers more choices.

Marlon West and Greg Smith shared duties as Visual Effects Supervisors and were on the forefront of implementing the new advances.

According to West, “Our main job on this film was to expand the world of Zootopia and take you to different places, but to have it be true to the world you already know. When Judy and Nick go to Marsh Market or to Lynxley Manor, those places need to feel like they’re part of Zootopia. From a character perspective, almost every character from the first film is back in some small way, from Gazelle to Finnick to Chief Bogo, but then you have a whole group of new characters like Gary and Nibbles. It was our job to make the world believable and consistent with the world audiences knew from the first film.”

“One of the most exciting and challenging scenes in the movie takes place inside a water tube, where Judy and Nick are propelled through a transport tube full of water,” adds West. “This required both a technical and artistic kind of back and forth. We treated the action like they were in a wind tunnel with their clothing being pushed back even though they’re being pushed forward. So, first of all, we had to figure out how to treat it like a wind tunnel as opposed to a water tube. We also had to figure out how much volume was in the tube, and how deep and far back the characters are. How much of the world did we want to show outside of the tube? There was a real push and pull to make it look like a believable volume of water, and still make it clear enough that the visual storytelling works.”

Greg Smith notes, “Using Presto as our animation system on this film made it feasible to animate some characters like Gary which would have been prohibitive using our legacy tools. It allowed us to simplify some of the animation controls, which would have otherwise been too complex and cumbersome in the previous system. Presto was also quite a bit faster for our animators to work with, and they got a lot of benefit from the more intuitive controls.”

The role of cinematographer for animated features at Disney is split into two parts: layout and lighting. Daniel Rice served as director of cinematography, lighting, and Tyler Kupferer was director of cinematography, layout. Together, they helped to give the film the sense of excitement, action, and innovation that fans loved in the original film.

“Jared delivered a script that you could already begin to picture from the very start,” observes Rice. “It gave you a lot of insight into the structure of the film that he was going for. Both he and Byron are amazing collaborators and gave us room to experiment and bring new ideas to the table.”

“As the storyboards started to come in, Daniel and I would put together mini cinematography check-ins with the directors, and talk about the cinematics and the vision they were building for the film,” adds Kupferer. “Each meeting would focus on different topics like what aspect ratio should the film use, or what sort of lens effects did they want. We also developed several distinct cinematic looks for the film including genre-driven ones for the car chase, which was meant to feel like an ‘80s action movie.”

FILMMAKER BIOS

JARED BUSH (DIRECTOR/WRITER) is the Chief Creative Officer of Walt Disney Animation Studios, overseeing all aspects of the creative direction of the studio, beginning the role September 2024. Bush is director (with Byron Howard) and writer of "Zootopia 2," the sequel to the Academy Award-winning feature for which he was co-director and co-writer. Bush was also executive producer and co-writer of Disney Animation's record-breaking hit "Moana 2," and was the screenwriter of the first "Moana."

During the 13 years Bush has been a writer and director at Disney Animation, beyond his work on the "Moana" and "Zootopia" films, he received an Academy Award, Golden Globe and BAFTA award for "Encanto," on which he was director (with Byron Howard) and co-writer. In 2021, the same year as "Encanto," Bush was also the executive producer for the Oscar-nominated "Raya and the Last Dragon." Additionally, Bush was the executive producer for the Disney+ series "Zootopia+," for which he received a Children's and Family Emmy Award.

He was also a writer of the upcoming live action version of "Moana," which is based on the Disney Animation film for which he wrote the screenplay. Bush has also written and advised on several projects in collaboration with Disney Animation Creative Legacy and Walt Disney Imagineering, including the Zootopia-themed land in Shanghai Disney Resort as well as the upcoming Zootopia and Encanto-themed attractions at Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park in Walt Disney World Resort.

Bush began his career as a script reader for director Robert Zemeckis, and prior to joining Disney Animation, he developed original television series for Revolution Studios, Fox and NBC, and feature film projects for New Line Cinema, Columbia/Tristar and 20th Century Fox.

A Harvard University graduate with a degree in English and American literature, Bush is an avid musician, and currently resides in Los Angeles with his college sweetheart and three sons.

BYRON HOWARD (DIRECTOR) is the Academy Award-winning director of Walt Disney Animation Studios' "Encanto" (with Jared Bush) and "Zootopia" (with Rich Moore). Howard also directed Disney Animation's worldwide hit feature "Tangled" with Nathan Greno, and the duo teamed up again for the short film "Tangled Ever After." Most recently, he was Animation Director for Disney Animation's "Moana 2" and for the new Walt Disney World attraction, "Zootopia: Better Zoogether."

As a child, Howard's favorite Disney Animation films included "Robin Hood," "Cinderella" and "Sleeping Beauty." He was also inspired by artists like Chuck Jones, Ronald Searle and Bill Watterson, and he would fill reams of computer paper with characters of his own creation. His love of art and animation continued through high school and college.

Howard earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at The Evergreen State College in Washington, where he pursued his interest in filmmaking by studying cinematography, art and literature. By 1991, he was part of the Disney family, hosting the animation tour at what was then Disney-MGM Studios in Orlando. In 1994, Howard officially joined Disney Animation in Florida as an inbetweener and clean-up artist on "Pocahontas." He quickly went on to become an animator on "Mulan" and a supervising animator on "Lilo & Stitch" and "Brother Bear," as well as doing character design on both of those films.

Howard later relocated to California where he continued his study of cinematography and drawing as a story artist and character designer at Disney Animation before becoming a director in 2006.

Disney Animation's Oscar-nominated feature "Bolt" marked Howard's debut as a feature film director (alongside Chris Williams). Howard also designed some of the characters in that film.

Howard loves the collaborative medium of animation because it combines art, cinematography, writing, design, acting and music with a family of supportive and talented artists and crew. Team members inspire each other to achieve something greater than they could alone.

In addition to his lifelong passion for animation and a career spanning the last 20+ years, Howard's interests include art, music, theater, travel and a deep love for animals.

YVETT MERINO (PRODUCER) previously produced Walt Disney Animation Studios' record-breaking hit, "Moana 2," the Emmy-winning short film, "Once Upon a Studio," and the Academy Award-winning "Encanto." She is the first Latina to receive the Oscar for Animated Feature for her work on that film. Merino first came to Disney Animation more than 25 years ago and has worked in a variety of production capacities on some of the most popular animated features of all time. Launching her Disney Animation career in the Technology department, she moved into the world of Production as a supervisor on "Tangled" and continued in that role on "The Lion King 3D," "Wreck It Ralph" and in Disney Animation's Development department. She then went on to serve as production manager on the Oscar-winning feature, "Big Hero 6," as well as the Oscar-nominated "Moana."

Merino was also a part of the team that started Voces@Disney, the Studio's first Latinx employee resource group, where she served as co-president for two years and currently as an Executive Champion for the group.

Merino holds an MBA from Loyola Marymount University and an undergraduate degree in Sociology from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

MICHAEL GIACCHINO (Composer) is an Academy Award-winning composer and director who has created the musical landscape for some of the most beloved projects in modern entertainment. His scoring portfolio reads like a greatest hits collection of 21st-Century cinema, encompassing animated masterpieces like "Zootopia," "The Incredibles," "Coco," "Ratatouille," and "Inside Out," blockbuster spectacles including Lucasfilm's "Star Wars: Rogue One," and Marvel's recent "Spider-Man" films, acclaimed dramas such as "Jojo Rabbit" and "Society of the Snow," in addition to the beloved score for the iconic ABC television show, "LOST."

His emotionally resonant score for Disney-Pixar's "Up" earned him a sweep of the industry's most prestigious honors: an Academy Award, Golden Globe®, BAFTA, Broadcast Film Critics' Choice Award, and two GRAMMY® Awards.

After nearly two decades establishing himself as one of Hollywood's premier composers, Giacchino expanded his artistic vision by making his directorial debut with Marvel's special presentation "Werewolf by Night," marking a new chapter in his multifaceted career.

He continues to compose music for films including this Marvel's 2025 release, "The Fantastic Four: First Steps."